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REVIEW OF PRIORITY THEMES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH COMMISSION RESOLUTION 1/1 ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT BY THE COMMISSION ON CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMME

Progress made on the fourth and fifth surveys of crime trends and operations of criminal justice systems, and other initiatives under way to acquire, process and distribute crime prevention and criminal justice data

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

A. Legislative background

1. The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, at its first session, listed several priorities to guide its work during the period 1992-1996 and determined one of them as "efficiency, fairness and improvement in the management and administration of criminal justice and related systems, with due emphasis on the strengthening of national capacities in developing countries for the regular collection, collation, analysis and utilization of data in the development and implementation of appropriate policies" (Economic and Social Council resolution 1922/22, section VI). In response to the Council's request made in resolution 1992/22, the Secretary-General submitted to the second session of the Commission a report on the need to identify the most practical course of action to fully operationalize the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme, including financial possibilities (E/CN.15/1993/5). In paragraphs 51-56, the Secretary-General reported on operational research and information gathering and exchange in the context of strengthening clearing-house facilities.

2. On the recommendation of the second session of the Commission, the Council in its resolution 1993/34, section IV, requested the Secretary-General to report to the Commission on progress made on the Fourth and Fifth Surveys of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, and other initiatives underway to acquire, process and distribute crime prevention and criminal justice data.

B. Substantive background

3. In all countries, the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of information appears vital to good governance. Accurate and complete information promotes efficient organization of government by dispelling misconceptions, exposing inefficiency, corruption and biases and, when made public, by serving to hold Governments accountable for their actions. The information derived from the United Nations surveys of crime trends and operations of criminal justice systems, for instance, can be used to review the developments in criminal justice operations at the national level in the context of international trends, policies and standards aimed at humane and efficient justice administration. However, content and provision of such information is dependent upon the socio-technical arrangements of national information systems, including accounting systems, computer equipment and the training of personnel in information management.

4. In both developed and developing countries, what is important is a commitment to foster accountability in criminal justice administration. However, there are substantial differences in the arrangements designed to collect, collate, analyse and disseminate data on crime and justice. This, in turn, results in substantial differences in the quantity, quality and availability of criminal justice information, and in the degree to which the various criminal justice administrators can be held accountable.

5. With the support of Member States to the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme, many of the difficulties experienced by developing countries in the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of data may be overcome. Developments in computer hardware and software further this objective. In recent years, computer equipment has become more powerful and cheaper. Thus, the computerization of criminal justice systems worldwide, and the openness, understanding and accountability that it facilitates, is a goal that seems closer (see document E/CN.15/1994/3). But again, it may not be achieved without more assistance on the part of Member States and the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme.

I. FOURTH UNITED NATIONS SURVEY OF CRIME TRENDS AND OPERATIONS OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS (1986-1990)

A. Fourth Survey: data collection

6. It follows from the above that the recurrent United Nations surveys of crime trends and operations of criminal justice systems, including the Fourth Survey, which is the latest one, have yielded some results consonant with the interest of the international community to strengthen the clearing-house functions of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme. However, the success of the survey depends on the commitment of Member States to provide data. The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1993/34, section IV, strongly encouraged Governments to continue to reply promptly to requests of the Secretary-General for crime prevention and c iminal justice data in order to ensure that those data can be processed and provided to all Member States and other interested parties in a timely and efficient manner. The Council also reaffirmed the usefulness of these information activities in crime prevention and criminal justice policy development and programme planning, but that usefulness is dependent on the number, timeliness, quality and completeness of the replies.

7. The replies to the Fourth Survey, while potentially very useful, indicate that there is considerable room for improvement in the above areas. With reference to the number and timeliness of the replies, despite launching the Fourth Survey in August 1992, replies are still being received in response to periodical reminders sent by the Secretariat. As of 14 January 1994, 91 replies had been received,* in comparison with 95 for the Third Survey (1980-1986), 77 for the Second Survey (1975-1980) and 64 for the First Survey (1970-1975). An extensive network of offices and individuals has been involved in collecting the replies. This network includes the Permanent Missions to the United Nations, directors of the national statistical offices (contacted separately by the Statistical Division of the Secretariat), resident representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), national correspondents in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice and the network of interregional and regional institutes of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme. The Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch has been notified that, in some instances, the questionnaire had not been forwarded to the responsible criminal justice authorities by the missions which were contacted by the Secretary-General. Moreover, several countries have provided two separate and contradictory replies.

B. Fourth Survey: data processing

8. In the light of the above, and with reference to the quality and completeness of the replies, a preliminary review indicates that considerable improvements can be made without incurring a great

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*From the following countries/territories: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Bermuda, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lesotho, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

financial cost. The quality of the data, at this time, appears to be the more pressing issue. Seemingly incorrect figures have been entered by many countries in response to several questions; data on convictions have been found entered in response to questions concerning suspects and prosecutions; and where two replies have been received from the same country, the data, as noted, are often contradictory. Such errors force criminal justice professionals and researchers to discount the data sets compiled and analyses thereof. They also demand time-consuming follow-up and data entry operations which cause considerable delays in the distribution of the data. Fortunately, such errors, while impossible to eliminate completely, can be significantly reduced through more careful data entry efforts by respondents. To avoid problems such as these, which inevitably lead to delays in processing and analysis of the data, the survey procedures will have to be reviewed.

9. The preliminary review of the replies also indicates that those received from developed countries tend to be more complete and contain fewer noticeable errors than those from developing countries. This is, perhaps, primarily a result of differentials in resources and the systems established to compile criminal justice data. But it may also reflect differentials in the extent to which such data are regarded as confidential, undisclosed because the distribution of such data is regarded as harmful to the country. In this connection, it seems essential to continue, if not intensify, efforts to improve the criminal justice information systems of developing countries and to promote openness concerning the provision of such information.[1] Efforts of this nature may further governmental accountability for criminal justice activities and, thus, assist the international community in its attempts to constrain oppressive tactics and promote democracy. The Commission may wish to emphasize this point in its considerations, as it appears to underlie efforts oriented towards good governance.

10. An acceptable preliminary data set should be available sometime during the first half of 1994. The data entry process, however, must be viewed as ongoing. Some Member States are still requesting corrections to the data set of the Third Survey. With regard to the Fourth Survey, the Branch began to send follow-up letters concerning questionable data to respondents in October 1993. By 10 December, there had been no replies. This is not to suggest that the data set cannot be used until all replies are received. Rather, it means that researchers and criminal justice professionals must exercise more caution with the earlier versions of the data set.

11. The data from the Fourth Survey, like that of the previous surveys, are being entered into computer files (Statistical Program for Social Sciences - SPSS) in an effort to facilitate quantitative analyses to identify crime trends and other patterns in the data, for example, through validity checks. In view of the small resources allocated for this project, this approach has, however, two related shortcomings. First, it makes the distribution of data in a hard copy (i.e. final) format, for example a publication, difficult. Secondly, while the SPSS files may be preferred by statistically oriented researchers, they tend to be difficult for other criminal justice professionals to utilize. The Commission may wish to consider this issue. There appears to be at least three options: (a) retain the present emphasis on statistical analyses with its limitations; (b) forgo analyses and emphasize the distribution of raw data, leaving it up to the international criminal justice community to analyse the data and draw conclusions; or (c) find additional resources which would allow for both satisfactory analyses and efficient dissemination of the data. The last option seems to be closest to the letter and spirit of General Assembly resolution 46/152, annex, section II, on the creation of an effective United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme. It envisages that the principles of the programme shall include regular international surveys to assess trends in crime and developments in the operations of criminal justice systems and, inter alia, on this basis to carry out research and studies at the national, regional and global levels in specific prevention issues and criminal justice measures. One of the purposes of the recurrent crime trends surveys is to demonstrate how the collected data can be meaningfully analysed, so as to encourage similar analyses at the regional and national levels with a view to accountable decision-making in criminal justice matters. It would be very unfortunate if this project were allowed to deteriorate for,

outside of the United Nations, there are perhaps no organizations with sufficient human resources to do a survey on a worldwide basis.

C. Fourth Survey: supplement on trends in transnational crime

12. Pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1992/22, section I, in addition to the Fourth Survey questionnaire dealing with conventional criminality and operations of criminal justice systems, the Secretary-General distributed a supplement on transnational organized crime. This pilot questionnaire requests Governments and international organizations to provide information on this subject. Because of legal and technical difficulties involved in surveying the question of transnational crime, the Branch does not expect replies of the same value as those received in response to the main part of the questionnaire. The results of this inquiry will be made available before the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders. While the replies are being processed* (and more are expected), the Commission may wish to encourage Governments and international organizations to give due consideration to the question of transnational organized crime by sharing their experiences in measuring transnational crime and its impact on the society.

II. FIFTH UNITED NATIONS SURVEY (1990-1993) AND INITIATIVES TO ANALYSE AND DISSEMINATE CRIME-RELATED DATA

A. Fifth Survey: questionnaire design and proposed course of action

13. Pursuant to the resolution of Council resolution 199/22, section I, paragraph 3 (f), the Secretary-General was requested to commence preparations for the Fifth Survey at the end of 1993. In December 1993, work started on the design of the questionnaire, with efforts being made to overcome the shortcomings identified during the Fourth Survey exercise. It is anticipated that the survey instrument will be sent out not later than the third quarter of 1994, with a response deadline proposed for mid-1995.

14. The Fifth Survey will cover the years 1990-1993 - 1990 being the overlapping year included in both the Fourth and Fifth Surveys, to check the reliability of the responses. As requested by the Council in the above resolution, the Survey will henceforth be conducted on a biennial basis, with the Sixth Survey collecting data for the years 1993-1995. While this may significantly improve the timeliness of data dissemination, it will also demand more resources and should, once again, bring attention to the need to decide precisely what type of data processing warrants the highest priority.

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*As of 14 January 1994, the following countries and international organizations had submitted their replies: Argentina, Austria, Belarus, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Kiribati, Mongolia, Myanmar, Oman, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tonga, Uganda; Caribbean Community Secretariat, Baltic and International Maritime Council, Council of Europe, International Council on Social Welfare, International Maritime Organization, Interpol, Nordic Council.

B. Initiatives to analyse and disseminate crime-related data

1. Report on crime and justice in the world

15. After the issuance of the publication on Trends in Crime and Criminal Justice, 1970-1985, in the Context of Socio-Economic Change,[2] which presented the results of the Second Survey and Crime Trends and Criminal Justice Operations at the Regional and Interregional Levels,[3] which reported on the results of the Third Survey, as determined by the Council in its resolution 1922/22, section I, the Secretary-General included in the 1994-1995 programme budget provision for a publication on the results of the Fourth Survey entitled Report on Crime and Justice in the World. Envisaged as a regular biennial global report on crime and justice, this publication, inter alia, will be modelled after the successful Human Development Report, published annually by UNDP.

16. The idea for the crime report was developed in three stages at meetings organized on the initiative of the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute at Rome (UNICRI). At the first session of UNICRI in 1991, experts began to conceptualize the outline of the publication, which was reported to the Commission at its second session (E/CN.15/1993/8/Add.1, para. 32; E/CN.15/1992/CRP.2). At the second session, held from 25 to 26 June 1992, the experts developed the table of contents of the publication, based on the progress made in obtaining Fourth Survey data. At the third session, held from 27 to 28 May 1993, they planned the division of labour among the drafters and set the deadlines for the completion of the report (E/CN.15/1994/10).

17. Unlike the UNDP report, which is fully budgeted, both the funding and drafting of the report on crime and justice is based mostly on voluntary contributions made by the Governments of the Netherlands (Ministry of Justice), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Home Office), the United States of America (Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Justice), the Australian Institute of Criminology and a number of criminologists who have been partly financed by UNICRI. Only part of the time of one staff member and the printing of the crime report is covered by the regular United Nations budget. The issuance of the crime report was planned to coincide with the Ninth United Nations Congress in 1995. This plan is jeopardized by delays in submitting the replies by some countries which informed the Branch of their intent in being included in the survey exercise. This, combined with prolonged data validation and a vacated post for a staff member involved directly in the Fourth Survey project, make it more likely that the report will not be published before the end of 1995.

2. UNCJIN Crime and Justice Letter

18. In accordance with the 1992-1993 programme budget, the Branch began publishing the "UNCJIN Crime and Justice Letter", which it is anticipated will be issued regularly. A special issue of the Letter, presenting analyses of data from the first three surveys, was distributed at the Ministerial Meeting on the Creation of an Effective United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, held at Versailles, from 21 to 23 November 1991. The first regular issue of the Letter (volume 1, Nos. 1/2, 1993), in addition to providing information on the objectives of United Nations Criminal Justice Information Network (UNCJIN) and how it operates, presents information on the Fourth Survey and a substantive article on global trends in criminal victimization, prepared by UNICRI.* This issue has already reached a large audience, including national correspondents, criminal justice professionals, representatives of statistical offices, heads of criminal justice institutes, individual researchers and the members of UNCJIN. One development was the interest of recipients to join the Network, expressed in letters to the Branch.

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*A limited number of copies of this issue are available to the Commission.

19. The second regular issue of the Letter (No. 3) was scheduled to be published in the second quarter of 1994. The Letter will include a report on developments concerning the World Criminal Justice Library Network; a report on trends in urban security in the world's largest cities, based on data from the Third and Fourth Surveys; and a report on services available through the Internet, a computer network which currently hosts UNCJIN. However, owing to the financial crisis of the Organization, this issue has been suspended until further notice.

20. The third regular issue (No. 4) is scheduled for release at the time of the Ninth United Nations Congress. It will, inter alia, report on trends of violence in the world, based on data from the Fourth Survey.

3. Regional analyses and publications of survey data: the work of the Institutes

21. Since 1985 the Branch has cooperated with several institutes in the regional analysis and publication of data from the Surveys. In connection with the Second and Third Surveys, the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations,* published Criminal Justice Systems in Europe[4] and Criminal Justice Systems in Europe and North America;[5] the Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI) produced Delineation of Crucial Issues of Criminal Justice in Asia (A/CONF.121/UNAFEI); UNAFEI, together with the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), published Crime and Justice in Asia and the Pacific;[6] and the Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders prepared a report on crime prevention in the context of development ("Tercer estudio de las Naciones Unidas sobre tendencias delictivas, funcionamiento de sistemas de justicia penal y estrategias de prevencion del delito") for the Eighth United Nations Congress.

22. With reference to the regional analysis and publication of Fourth Survey data, this cooperation continues. The European Institute is preparing a third publication on criminal justice systems in Europe. Because the data received from European countries tends to be complete and consistent, the report of the European Institute may be more elaborate than the other regional reports. It may also be presented as a model for future regional analyses of crime trends and criminal justice systems, without losing sight of the legal and socio-political differences between regions. UNAFEI and the AIC are also preparing a third report on crime and justice in Asia and the Pacific. It is anticipated that the report will include analyses from a socio-economic perspective.

23. Other institutes were invited to present regional analyses of the Fourth Survey data, as determined in Economic and Social Council resolution 1992/22, section I. The Secretariat anticipates that the African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFRI) will publish its first regional report covering 14 African countries. However, in view of the rather small number of Arab countries that provided a substantial amount of information, a report on the Arab region appears unlikely. Means of resolving this unfortunate situation have been discussed with representatives of the Arab Institute for Security and Training Studies.

24. It is expected that all of these Fourth Survey publications will be available at the time of the Ninth United Nations Congress.

25. The Commission may wish to know that portions of the data in the form of country criminal justice profiles have been available in an electronic format through UNCJIN on the Internet. After completion

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*Formerly called the Helsinki Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI).

of the Fourth Survey exercise, these profiles will be updated. Fourth Survey data in the form of time series will also be added to UNCJIN and, thus, be available sooner to its members, probably at the end of 1994.

III. CONCLUSIONS

26. On the basis of the preceding observations, certain conclusions emerge which may serve as a basis for discussion at the third session of the Commission.

27. First, the experience gathered by the Secretariat in the collection, collation, analysis and utilization of crime prevention and criminal justice data, as reviewed above, indicates that while regional and interregional interest in this activity has increased considerably, the capacity of the crime prevention and criminal justice programme would need to be strengthened in order to meet the expectations of the international criminal justice community and to provide adequate assistance to developing countries which are striving to improve their criminal justice databases and promote good governance (see paras. 3 and 9, above).

28. Secondly, in an effort to make the United Nations surveys more efficient and useful, the Commission may wish to establish specific, concrete priorities for the processing of survey data, without losing sight of the corresponding resource requirements (see para. 11, above).

29. Thirdly, the Commission may wish to encourage Governments and international organizations to give due consideration to the question of transnational organized crime by sharing their experiences in measuring transnational crime and its impact on society (see para. 12, above).

30. Fourthly, the Commission may wish to suggest specific topics that should be dealt with in future issues of the UNCJIN Crime and Justice Letter, keeping in mind that it should offer its readers a review of developments in UNCJIN and updates on trends in crime and criminal justice operations around the world (see para. 20, above).

Notes

[1]Manual for the Development of Criminal Justice Statistics, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 43 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.XVII.16).

[2]United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.IV.3.

[3]United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.IV.2.

[4]Publications series No. 5 (Helsinki, HEUNI, 1985).

[5]Publication series No. 17 (Helsinki, HEUNI, 1985).

[6]Canberra and Tokyo, UNAFEI and AIC, 1990.